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bcc: GrndZeroCO

I thought this was a rather informative send from the Hawaiian Lambda list. Feel free to re-circulate. -- Scott

Hawai`i Council of Churches: Interfaith perspective on SSM

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An Interfaith perspective on same gender marriage

INTRODUCTION

Our state of Hawai`i, its citizens and religious communities are in the throes of public debate about whether persons of the same gender who wish to enter into covenantal relationships should be granted the same legal
rights and privileges as heterosexual married couples. This debate has embroiled many in the religious sector, foremost those in the Christian community, in divisive debate on the sanctity of marriage the morality of homosexuality, and the civil rights of persons with same gender orientation.

Flaming the debate is the equating of civil recognition of marriage

or domestic partnership with the spiritual significance of covenantal relationships. The one is a civil rights issue, the latter is a religious issue While people of faith may begin to approach common ground on the civil rights issue, there is no consensus on the sanctity and meaning of marriage, it definition, or whether it should be open to gay and lesbian persons.

At the same time, committed covenantal relationships take many forms
and are deeply value in faith communities and are not confined solely to marriage vows, but include many interpersonal and community relationships--including friendship, family ties, religious vows, as well as
the vows taken at initiation into membership in a faith community. These covenantal relationships are a stablizing influence on community life.

While flie public debate has focused largely around Christian interpretation of its scriptures, we live in a community of diverse religious beliefs, where the Christian community represents approximately a
third of the population. In our religiously diverse society, no single religious tradition or group of traditions should attempt to use legal structures to impose particular moral traditions upon the wider society in any way that compromises the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution and
Bill of Rights.

That which nearly every faith affirms is the value of human beings. Before God the inequalities of value which any society recognizes are erased; before God all are of equal value. It is this inherent spiritual value of persons which underlies the legal expression of human and civil rights.

The scriptures and writings of different faiths describe and endorse a wide variety of family forms including polygamy, levirite, trial marriages
and celibate singles (of which some are no longer legal). As persons of faith we affirm the dignity of the individual and adhere to the standard of

love and justice in covenantal relationships and support models of marriage
that affirm each person's worth as a whole human being who enters into a relationslilp with mutual love and respect.

THE DIVERSITY OF OUR FAITH COMMUNITIES

While our religious communities are wrestling with the issue of whether same~gender marriages shall be sanctioned within our various traditions, we, the undersigned, believe that an essential distinction must be made between this religious debate and the question of whether couples of
the same gender should have access to the legal privileges of marriage as a
matter of civil rights.

In the Hawai`ian tradition, no clear pattern emerges. Traditional Hawai`ian society is open and accepting of relationship diversity, including
same-gender relationships. Prior to the introduction of western culture, the word "marry" was not in the language and the concept of marriage itself
was foreign. Different kinds of relationships were accepted and open. Procreation was valued and children were protected and valued. The acceptance of people who are gay, lesbian and bisexual as part of the family
varies by region, family lines, and by individual openness and reticence.

In the Jewish tradition, the Reform Movement is committed "to the fundamental principle that we are all created in the divine image" and has "been in the vanguard of the support for the full recognition of equality for lesbians and gays in society." In 1977, the Central Conference of American Rabbis adopted a resolution encouraging
legislation which decriminalizes homosexual acts between consenting adults, and
prohibits discrimination against them as persons. Then, in 1993, the Union

of American Hebrew Congregations observed that "committed lesbian and gay couples are denied the benefits routinely accorded to married heterosexual couples" and resolved that full equality under the law for lesbian and gay people requires legal recognition of lesbian and gay relationships. In March, 1996, the Annual Convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis resolved to the support the right of gay and lesbian couples to share fully and equally in the rights of civil marriage," "oppose governmental efforts to ban gay and lesbian marriage," and further that "this is a matter of civil law, and is separate from the question of rabbinic officiation at such marriages."

The Buddhist view recognizes that Buddhism is a religion of choice, where a person chooses options consistent with their own conscience and spiritual deveolpment and outlook. It is, therefore, difficult to frame a view that is acceptable to all Buddhists. Buddhists will, however, recognize that there is room for wide disagreement without violating a person's civil rights or demeaning their humanity.

In the area of sexual activity, Buddhists are exhorted to refrain from activities that are harmful to themselves or others. Vvhatever is done with mutual consent should be accepted, whether heterosexual, gay or lesbian. With respect to Buddhist teachings themselves, a fundamental principle of Buddhism is karma which indicates that there are many factors that come into play in creating a person the way they are and beyond the control of any individual. Some of these factors are racial, gender, heredity, social and cultural environment. While not an excuse to justify inexcusable behavior, this principle indicates that we are more complex beings than we appear and that we should treat others with respect, even though we may not understand the mode or style of life they have chosen. We should not limit their access to social and civil benefits and rights that are available to any other person irrespective of gender relationships.

Buddhism also stresses the principle of interdependence whereby each person's life is affected by others and one's life also affects others. Any relationship which fulfills the happiness and well-being of another is a positive and acceptable relationship.

There are other Buddhist principles which would serve to show that same gender relationships and the rights that follow from them, such as marriage, can be positive in assisting a person to discover their own true nature and to realize the depth of their spiritual potentiality.

The United Church of Christ General Synod has consistently supported the civil liberties and human rights of all persons in church and society, regardless of sexual orientation and "affirmed gay, lesbian and bisexual persons and their ministries" by calling upon "local churches, associations and conferences to adopt an Open and Affirming policy (i.e., non-discrimination policy and a covenant of openness and affirmiation of persons of lesbian, gay and bisexual orientation within the community of faith)."

In 1975 the General Synod passed the "Pronouncement on Civil Liberties Without Discrimination Related to Affectional or Sexual Preference":

". . . without considering in this document the rightness or wrongness of same-gender relationships, but recognizing that a person's affectional or sexual preference is not legitimate grounds on which to deny her or his civil liberties, the Tenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ proclaims the Christian conviction that all persons are entitled to full civil liberties and equal protection under the law.

"Further, the Tenth General Synod declares its support for the enactment of legislation at the federal, state, and local levels of

government that would guarantee the liberties of ail persons without discrimination related to affectional or sexual preferences."

The Episcopal Church in the United States in 1976 affirmed that "homosexual persons are entitled to equal protection under the law." In 1991 the church reaffimed this position and further resolved the "unique place of the religious aspects of heterosexual marriage, as belonging in and to the church and not the state." The 71st General Convention of the Episcopal Church also called "upon municipal councils, state legislatures and the United States Congress to approve measures giving gay and lesbian couples protection such as: bereavement and family leave policies, health benefits, pension benefits, real estate transfer tax benefits, and commitments to mutual support enjoyed by non~gay married couples."

The United Methodist Church adopted the following statement on the "Rights of Homosexual Persons" at its 1992 General Conference as part of the Social Principles contained within The Book of Discipline, 1992:

"Certain basic human rights and civil liberties are due all persons. We are committed to support those rights and liberties for homosexual persons. We see a clear issue of simple justice in protecting their rightful claims where they have: shared material resources, pensions, guardian relationships, mutual powers of attorney, and other such lawful claims typically attendant to contractual relationships which involve shared contributions, responsibilities, and liabilities, and equal protection before the law. Moreover, we support efforts to stop violence and other forms of coercion against gays and lesbians." (The Book of Discipline-1992, Paragraph 710, page 92. Copyright 1992 by The United Methodist Publishing House.)

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), in Resolution Concerning Civil Liberties of Homosexual Persons, at its General Assembly raised concern for "homosexual persons (who) are victims of discrimination, daily losing jobs or being denied employment, losing their homes, being denied custody and visitation rights of their children, being denied financial credit, insurance, accreditation, licensing and other rights simply on the basis of their sexual orientation or preference".

The General Assembly also recognized that "The church, among other elements of society, has contributed to rhe persecution and suffering of homosexuals, and it is its culpability in this regard which provides one reason for seeking a more enlightened understanding."

"The General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada . . . while neither approving of nor condemning homosexuality, urge(s) the passage of legislation on local, state and national levels which will end denial of civil rights and the violation of civil liberties for reasons of sexual preference, and calls upon its members to advocate and support the passage and maintenance of such legislation."

The Unitarian Universalist Association passed the resolution "Support of thc Right to Marry for Same~Sex Couples" at its 1996 General Assembly, "in support of the legal recognition for marriage between members of the same sex;" and urging its "member congregations to proclaim the worth of marriage between any two committed persons and to make this position known in their home communities."

The Presbyterian Church, USA at its 1996 General Assembly "affirmed the Presbyterian Cburcb's historic definition of marriage as a civil contract between a man and a woman, yet recognized that committed same-sex

partners seek equal civil liberties in a contractual relationship with all the civil rights and privileges and status of married couples." The General Assembly further urged the office of the Stated Clerk to explore the feasibility of entering friend-of-the-court briefs and support legislation in favor of giving civil rights to same-sex partners."

CIVIL RECOGNITION OF MARRIAGE IS DISTINCT FROM ITS RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE
AND MEANING.

Debate over the legalization of same-gender marriage has grown heated, in part, because the issue touches both on questions of civil rights and on deeply held convictions as to the meaning and significance--including
the spiritual significance and religious meaning--of marriage. The discussion of same-gender marriage is still under debate among and within
communities of faith, nevertheless, some religious communities have come
forward explicitly to support and perform same-gender unions

The issue of determining the legitimate civil rights of same-gender couples is
distinguishable from the question of whether same-gender marriage is acceptable within the moral traditions of particular religious communities.

The State's recording of a marriage does not, in itself certify the spiritual meaning of marriage to a couple. In fact the Hawai`i marriage certificate provides that each marriage ceremony be recorded as a religious
OR as a civil ceremony.

RESOLUTION

Therefore, be it resolved, that the undersigned oppose any

constitutional amendment or other statute concerning same-gender marriage which would offend the Bill of Rights or impose one religious vision of the spiritual and moral significance of marriage on everyone; and supports the full judicial resolution of *Baehr v. Miike* without legislative interference.

Be it further resolved, that the undersigned oppose any governmental action that would impose a duty upon any faith community to solemnize marriages contrary to their religious and moral views.

Be it further resolved that while the undersigned recognize that there is great diversity in the faith community regarding the unique place ofthe religious and spiritual aspects of marriage, we call upon appropriate municipal, state and national legislative bodies to approve measures giving gay and lesbian couples protection such as: bereavement and family leave policies, health benefits, pension benefits, real estate transfer tax benefits, and commitments to mutual support enjoyed by non-gay married couples.

Be it further resolved, that the undersigned invite all persons of faith, in the spirit of reconciliation, to experience the struggle and joy of the journey toward openness and affirmation of all lesbian and gay persons.

SIGNATORIES
Organizations:
The Hawai`i Council of Churches, Board of Directors
Bridges for Justice and Compassion

Individuals (organizations listed for identification purposes only):
Rabbi Dr. Stephan F Barack. Temple Bet Shalom
Alfred Bloom, Hongwaji Mission of Hawai`i Association of International Buddhists
The Rev. Steven Bonsey, The Parish of St. Clement

The Rev. Dr. Jon Bullock., Ke Anuenue o ke Aloha
The Rev. Michael Burnett, Executive Director, Ho`omana`olana
The Rev. Donna Paith Eldredge, Execurive Director, Hawai'i Council of Churches
Carolyn M. Golojuch, GLYS, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays
The Rev. Jayne Ryan Kuroiwa, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
The Rev. D. Neal MacPherson, Church of the Crossroads
Rabbi Avi Magid, Temple Emanu-El
The Rev. Bob Nakata, Coordinator of Community Planning, Kokua Kalihi Valley
The Rev. Dr. John Norris, First Christian Church
Kahu Tyrone Reinhardt, Kaulamapueo Church
The Rev. Mark L. Richardson, United Methodist Campus Minister at UH Manoa
The Rev. James L. Roessler; Lutheran Pastor, Evangelical Luthreran Church in
America
The Rev. Buddy Summers, Christ Church Uniting Disciples and Presbyterians
The Rev. Mike Young, First Unitarian Church of Honolulu
and others

[Religious organizations, faith communities and individuals who wish to bave
their names added to the list of signatories may contact the Hawai`i Council
of Churches, (808) 538-0068.]

An Interfaith Perspective on Same-Gender Marriage--Board Approved 9/25/96.